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Utilization and perceived impact of smart phone apps among persons pursuing mental health services

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Background: Little research has been done to assess the utilization and efficacy of mental health applications (apps) designed for use on phones and other ‘smart’ devices. The purpose of this study is to address 1) whether and by what means individuals have been made aware of the availability and use of mental health apps, 2) their projected likelihood of using such apps or, if used, the frequency with which they are used, and 3) among those who do use mental health apps, the degree to which individuals perceive the technology to have advanced their progress toward relevant wellness goals. **Method:** Data was derived from voluntary response to a questionnaire provided to persons presenting for treatment at an outpatient mental health clinic. Results associated with the preceding inform the budding literature concerning the use and experienced utility of mental health application. **Results:** Of 100 participants, there were 33 males, 44 females, and 23 who did not indicate gender. Age distribution was 18-25 = 27, 26-35 = 34, 36-45 = 22, 46-64 = 11, 65+ = 1, and 5 missing. A total of 30 respondents claim awareness of mental health apps, while only 13 recording ownership, with 79 denying this. 19% of respondents reported being made aware of mental health applications by a provider. There was no consensus on the usefulness of mental health apps based on the responses of those who were aware. **Conclusions:** It appears that less than 1/3 (30%) of participants identify that they are aware of the existence of mental health apps and even fewer are reporting their likelihood to use. Level of perceived usefulness could not be assessed. Taken together, these data carry potentially significant implications for focusing future advertising and awareness campaigns to improve 1) provider awareness of the availability and utility of mental health apps and 2) their willingness to recommend apps to patients for mental health care outside of appointments and 3) patient perception of the usefulness of apps and subsequent increased utilization..

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